UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

V.

TAREK MEHANNA,

Defendant.

BEFORE THE HONORABLE GEORGE A. O'TOOLE, JR. UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

MOTION HEARING

John J. Moakley United States Courthouse
Courtroom No. 22
One Courthouse Way
Boston, Massachusetts 02210
Wednesday, July 13, 2016
2:02 p.m.

Marcia G. Patrisso, RMR, CRR
Official Court Reporter
John J. Moakley U.S. Courthouse
One Courthouse Way, Room 3510
Boston, Massachusetts 02210
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Mechanical Steno - Computer-Aided Transcript

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1 PROCEEDINGS THE CLERK: All rise. 2 3 (The Court enters the courtroom at 2:02 p.m.) THE CLERK: The United States District Court for the 4 5 District of Massachusetts. The court is in session. Be seated. 7 For a motion hearing in the case of United States v. Tarek Mehanna, 09-10017. Will counsel identify yourselves, 8 please. 00:00 10 MR. CHAKRAVARTY: For the government, your Honor, Aloke Chakravarty. 11 12 MS. SILVA PALMER: Good afternoon, your Honor. Julie 13 Silva Palmer for the defendant, Tarek Mehanna. 14 MR. WILLETT: Good afternoon, your Honor. Sabin Willett with Ms. Silva Palmer. 15 MR. CELLA: Good afternoon, your Honor. Arcangelo 16 Cella with Ms. Palmer. 17 18 THE COURT: So as you know, I suggested that in light 19 of something the circuit had said about the alternate 00:01 20 possibilities of proof, that it might be possible to resolve 21 the petition on that narrow issue. You've now briefed it. Thank you for the briefs. They're excellent. And so I would 22 23 ask you now to address that point. 24 MS. SILVA PALMER: May I? 25 Good afternoon, your Honor. Before I get to the legal

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argument, I think everyone makes -- we'd like to address the government's best-case scenario head on, and in that scenario, the government argues that Kohlmann was independent of the Yemen theory when he was, in fact, at the heart of the Yemen theory.

And to illustrate, I'd ask you to imagine the jury in the jury room. It had just retired after closing arguments and hearing the charge, and it's considering whether the government proved beyond a reasonable doubt that when Mehanna traveled to Yemen he sought a training camp, or was he looking for a school? What was his intent?

There was no direct evidence in the record, as the First Circuit observed, that answered that question. And the jury had to consider all the evidence, including evidence it heard only from Kohlmann. Now, relying only on that evidence, in its closing argument the government argued that Mehanna worked for al-Qa'ida. A proffered witness, a disinterested witness, he had advised media networks in general, and as an expert he had a special aura of reliability.

The jury knew that Mehanna went to Yemen and they're trying to figure out why he went. The expert says that he worked for al Qa'ida; what does that say about his intent in traveling to Yemen? That testimony cannot be immaterial, and for that reason, Kohlmann was not only material, he was central to the Yemen theory.

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Moving on to the legal argument, we want to make three points: The first is that *Griffin* does not apply to this case. The government acknowledges that the *Brady* standard applies and not the standard under *Griffin*, but it applies the logic of *Griffin* in its argument, and that's an invitation for error.

The real test in this context is whether in the context of the entire record the absence of expressed evidence undermines confidence in the outcome of the trial; the test is not whether there was enough left in the record to convict when you take the tainted witness to the side. We can't answer that question directly without seeing the withheld evidence, but we can say that Kohlmann's testimony was material.

Second, I would like to address the *Conley* case which is directly on point here, and it shows that the government's arguments clearly were closed. Applying the standard, *Mehanna* has to show that Kohlmann impacted the trial in a way that undermines confidence in the verdict. The government's already conceded that Kohlmann provided the only actual link to al Qa'ida in the case, and Kohlmann alone allowed the government to argue that Mehanna worked for al Qa'ida. That testimony was not corroborated.

And in the trial the government used that testimony in that way. It repeatedly argued to the jury that the jury could infer intent on Yemen based on that testimony. It can't now cordon off Kohlmann and consider just what was left, because

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what Kohlmann said had an impact on what the jury considered.

And then the third point, your Honor, is that applying the correct standard, Mehanna is entitled to some relief even if the Court finds that Kohlmann was not material on the Yemen theory, and the reason for that is that there were seven counts, and the analysis is a little bit different for each count because each count has different elements.

So in the first point, on *Griffin*, as I said, the government cites the *Brady* standard and concedes that this is not a sufficiency argument, but it's applying *Griffin* for its logic and the sufficiency rule. And if there can be any doubt that it's relying upon *Griffin*, it explicitly says so in page 17 of its brief.

Griffin and Brady are opposite. The purpose -- under Griffin, we're looking to see whether there's any evidence in the record at all that could support a guilty verdict, and the reason for that is because we assume that there's been a fair trial and they make -- they make all inferences in favor of the verdict and ignore credibility judgments because we assume that the jury is competent in factfinding.

The purpose of the *Brady* line of cases is the opposite. In the *Brady* case, we're trying to determine if the trial process itself was unfair. The question is -- in order to determine whether the process was unfair, we'd consider whether the evidence that was withheld was material.

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The inquiry considers the whole record to see how the government's error undermined -- whether it undermined confidence in the verdict. And in order to undermine confidence, the defendant doesn't have to show that he was innocent, he doesn't have to show that there were otherwise insufficient evidence in the record to convict, and he doesn't have to show that he would have been acquitted if the government had disclosed the evidence; the question is whether -- are we still confident in light of the evidence that the defendant would have been found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Now, we don't apply a sufficiency analysis in a *Brady* case because the underlying assumptions that the trial was unfair -- or that the trial was fair in a sufficiency case, that assumption doesn't apply in a *Brady* case so there's no need to be differential to the trial process because it might have been tainted. And this is why the government doesn't cite any *Brady* cases that apply the sufficiency doctrine.

Conley v. United States, which we cite in our brief, is a great illustration of how sufficiency doesn't apply in a Brady case. That case was a perjury case. The government accused the defendant of lying about what he saw at the scene of a battery. There was no direct evidence. The government presented three witnesses: Two of those witnesses had credibility problems, and a third witness was presented as

disinterested.

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The jury returned a guilty verdict, and the First Circuit affirmed that verdict on the sufficiency doctrine.

Following the appeal, the defendant brought a 2255 based on the government's failure to disclose evidence concerning the third disinterested witness. The government argued in Conley that the testimony of the two witnesses alone provided sufficient evidence for the jury to convict even without the disinterested witness's testimony. The First Circuit said that that argument was clearly foreclosed because even if you cordon off that witness, that witness said things that could have impacted the jury's determination.

Applying Conley here, there is some remarkable parallels that have gone unanswered by the government in its brief. The government doesn't address this case at all. On direct appeal, the First Circuit said that there was sufficient evidence in the record to convict based on Yemen.

The government is urging the Court to put Kohlmann to the side and rule that there was enough based on what the First Circuit said to convict without considering Kohlmann. Brady requires consideration of how Kohlmann impacted the verdict, not whether there was enough left when you put the testimony to the side.

The First Circuit in *Mehanna*'s case observed that there was no direct evidence of intent and affirmed on the

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grounds that there was sufficient evidence on the Yemen theory. Ultimately, as the First Circuit recognized, the jury heard evidence on both theories, that he intended to find a camp and that he intended to find a school. And as we've just discussed, Kohlmann played a critical role in that determination.

The lay witnesses that the government put on all had credibility problems. They had testified inconsistently, they had changed -- some changed testimony over time, they were testifying pursuant to immunity deals, one had admitted to lying under oath. Kohlmann allowed the government, like in Conley, to put on a disinterested witness. And here the effect is arguably greater than it was in Conley because Kohlmann was an expert and he carries a greater aura of reliability as an expert. And just as Kohlmann urged the jury, Kohlmann's testimony did impact the outcome.

Finally, your Honor, Mehanna doesn't need to prove that Kohlmann impacted the outcome -- I'm sorry -- that Kohlmann was material to Yemen in order to be entitled to relief, and the reason for that is this: There were seven counts at trial. Six of them involved the Yemen theory. Counts 1 to 3 went to the jury on a general verdict. And the theory submitted to the jury for those three counts was that -- it was either Yemen or the advocacy theory, as you're well aware. We don't know what the jury found on those three counts

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because they returned a general verdict and there's no way to know which theory they chose.

Count 1 had an al Qa'ida element. And that was the only count in the entire case that had an al Qa'ida element.

And we can't presume from the remaining counts that the jury would have found an al Qa'ida element on Count 1 from what they found in the other counts.

And that's all I have, your Honor.

THE COURT: Just on the last -- are you arguing as to Count 1 only the translation theory applied to Count 1?

MS. SILVA PALMER: No, on Count 1 it could have -- the jury's verdict could have been based on Yemen or it could have been based on the translation theory. And the government has essentially conceded -- and it's impossible to refute that Kohlmann was essential to the translation theory. So because we don't know whether the jury's verdict depended on Yemen or depended on advocacy where it was a general verdict, we don't know if the jury relied on the advocacy theory to find that count.

THE COURT: Okay. Let me come back to your main point, I think, which is that Kohlmann's testimony was material to the Yemen theory. Kohlmann said very little about Yemen, right? He said something --

MS. SILVA PALMER: He said some things about Yemen.

THE COURT: There are camps there and so on, and that

1 was controverted by the defense. It doesn't really matter whether there were actually camps there, does it? 2 MS. SILVA PALMER: It could have to the jury. We 3 don't know what they considered. There's no way to know what 4 5 the jury considered. Maybe --6 THE COURT: The offense was going there with an 7 intent. If it was a mistake, the defendant would still be culpable, wouldn't he? 8 9 MS. SILVA PALMER: It could have been. And under the 00:12 10 sufficiency argument, that is the analysis that you'd apply. 11 But here we don't know whether the jury found that testimony persuasive or not. We don't know if the jury would have said 12 13 there's no Yemen -- there's no al Qa'ida in Yemen, and for that 14 reason, we doubt that that was his intent in going there. They 15 were trying to figure out what his intent was, and in doing that, they considered all the evidence; they didn't consider 16 just the government's best case. 17 18 THE COURT: Okay. But besides that, you also argue 19 that Kohlmann's testimony about the online work also impeaches 00:13 20 the jury verdict on the Yemen theory? 21 MS. SILVA PALMER: Yes. 22 THE COURT: Why? 23 MS. SILVA PALMER: The reason is because Kohlmann said 24 this translation that Tarek Mehanna produced -- the government 25 said Tarek Mehanna produced -- was coordinated with al Qa'ida.

1 Kohlmann provided the sole-source testimony, the only link between al Qa'ida and Mehanna in the entire case. He said 2 Mehanna worked for al Qa'ida. THE COURT: Can you point me to that? Is that in your 4 5 brief? Maybe it's in your brief. 6 MS. SILVA PALMER: Yes. Yes, it is in the brief. 7 Can you get me that cite, please? THE COURT: If it's in the brief, I'll find it. 8 9 MS. SILVA PALMER: It's in the brief. 00:13 10 Kohlmann's testimony allowed the government to say when Tarek Mehanna translated these documents, he was working 11 12 for al Qa'ida. There was no other connection to al Qa'ida in 13 the case. He was the only actual link, as the government 14 termed it, in its brief. If the jury's considering the question of did he go to 15 al Qa'ida seeking a camp or did he go to al Qa'ida intending to 16 find a school, and keep in mind --17 THE COURT: You mean Yemen. 18 19 MS. SILVA PALMER: I'm sorry. The only question on the Yemen theory was his intent 00:14 20 in going there, the jury considering weighing the guestion of 21 22 whether he went seeking a camp or he went seeking a school. And the government says, Well, you can figure out what his 23 24 intent was when he did this because when he came back, he 25 started working for al Qa'ida.

That's a dramatic weight on the side of intending to find an al Qa'ida training camp. If he was just going there to find a school, that theory's a little bit more plausible if he didn't come home and start working for al Qa'ida.

THE COURT: Okay.

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MS. SILVA PALMER: Thank you, your Honor.

MR. CHAKRAVARTY: Your Honor, let me just pick up on that point. The defense in the case on the Yemen theory was that he was going for innocent purposes, for a school, language training, something else. It did not differentiate whether it was an al Qa'ida training camp versus some other training camp. So my sister claims that the prejudice that may have emerged from Mr. Kohlmann's testimony about al Qa'ida somehow could have infected the purpose for which the defendant was going to Yemen is completely incongruous.

The jury was not going to determine whether he went to a training camp that was not al Qa'ida. The defense offered no evidence that it was some other training camp. So this notion that this spillover prejudice applied from Kohlmann's testimony to the Yemen camp is, frankly, unsustainable.

The government has disputed some of the things which the defendant claims were given in this case and unrefutable — the fact that he was an essential witness, even to the translation theory; that he was the only witness to the actual link to al Qa'ida. I won't belabor those except to say that we

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dispute those and we articulated why -- but that highlights the fact that the defendant has not met its burden of proof at this post-trial, post-conviction, post-appeal, post-denial of cert proceeding where they have to do more than just speculate what a jury may have considered, but rather, actually demonstrate that there was a frailty that if Kohlmann was further impeachable, then this pillar of the government's case, the Yemen theory, which I'll get to in a moment as to why it was so obviously independent of the translation and other testimony for which Kohlmann was called -- and he wasn't the exclusive witness -- but they haven't met their burden. They haven't articulated one statement that Kohlmann said that was critical to that theory.

Going to the next point of the one area of testimony that Kohlmann had of relevance to the Yemen theory was a -- was factual testimony elicited for the first time on cross-examination. Essentially, Kohlmann was being put up and offering defense witness testimony, not testimony being offered to prove an element of the case by the government. So -- and now they're claiming that the purpose of that testimony was solely for the purpose of then impeaching that testimony.

He became the defense expert on whether there were camps in Yemen. Surely that cannot be prejudicial if, in fact, that were relevant -- and the government argues that it wasn't relevant at all whether there were actual camps -- but to the

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extent it was an issue at all, it was a defense issue. They were trying to create a strong issue as to whether al Qa'ida existed and further to impeach Kohlmann's testimony, which as your Honor pointed out, was further advanced -- that theory was further advanced by their own experts. I think they called two experts, Mr. Johnsen as well as Mr. Sageman, to refute this issue that they created themselves on cross-examination.

But to put a finer point on why Kohlmann's testimony could not be material to the Yemen points, not only did he not testify about it, but I specifically asked him on redirect examination after this phantom issue about Yemen had been raised on cross, as to whether he had consulted any of the witness statements, whether he was aware of any testimony or information about the defendant's trip to Yemen, and he said no.

And there was zero evidence that he knew anything to either corroborate victim testimony or witness testimony or some of the coconspirators who was the core of the Yemen case. It was percipient witnesses, it was people who shared the intent and actually went on the journey with him, it was his own statements. The evidence regarding the Yemen trip was overwhelming. And so then I'll come back to where we started, which is *Griffin*.

In light of that overwhelming testimony about the Yemen trip, this isn't the sufficiency matter, but it is hard

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to imagine a circumstance in which Kohlmann's testimony could potentially be material to overwhelming evidence, especially given that it would be impeaching of Kohlmann's general credibility as opposed to a specific fact that he said about Yemen or about the Yemen trip intent. Your Honor carefully policed the 704 rule, and he didn't opine as to Mr. Mehanna's requisite intent.

But with overwhelming evidence showing that the Yemen trip occurred for these illicit purposes as enunciated in Counts 1 through 4, further impeachment of him could not have impacted that basis of conviction. And if nothing else, when the First Circuit says that the courts are not well equipped to intrude into that jury chamber, as the defense invites you to do, to speculate as to what facts ultimately went in their calculus, but in this case where there are two factually distinct theories, which each are supportable by facts in law, as the First Circuit has found, then a conviction on the factual basis for the Yemen theory is certainly sufficient and it -- the defense hasn't met any burden to suggest that Kohlmann's testimony could have impacted that aside from the rhetoric of saying, Well, it must have because this was an al Qa'ida case, and if he talked about al Qa'ida, then it must have infected it.

And at the end of the day when you go down into the record and you look at what they have offered to suggest that

1 that actually is what happened here and that there was a material -- there could be something that was material, there's 2 3 just nothing there. For that reason, the motion should be denied. 4 5 MS. SILVA PALMER: May I? 6 THE COURT: Yes. 7 MS. SILVA PALMER: Thank you, your Honor. I would like to hone in on something Mr. Chakravarty 8 9 just said. He's saying that the intent on -- the intent 00:21 10 question for the jury on the Yemen theory was did he go for 11 innocent purposes or did he not go for innocent purposes? And that's my point. My point is that the jury's much more likely 12 13 to find that he didn't go for innocent purposes. If he came 14 home from Yemen and started working for al Qa'ida, working for 15 al Qa'ida is not an innocent purposes. THE COURT: Well, are you saying that precisely, 16 because I'm sort of trying to gauge -- when you say "working 17 for al Qa'ida," are you making a specific point, are you saying 18 19 generally acting in ways that gave support to foreign 00:21 20 terrorists --21 MS. SILVA PALMER: No, I'm making a specific point 22 about al Qa'ida; this is not a question about advocacy and --23 THE COURT: Putting that aside then, wasn't there 24 overwhelming evidence of his interest in and support for jihad 25 in general?

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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: He can have interest and support
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         jihad in general.
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                  THE COURT: Well, an activity too.
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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: Right. That's not a criminal
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         activity. The fact that he --
                  THE COURT: Well, no, I'm talking about the criminal
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         part of it. In other words, the defense is sharing -- are you
         saying that it's critical that the beneficiary of his efforts
         have been al Qa'ida specifically or jihad generally in the
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         region?
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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: Oh, I think I understand the
         distinction you're making. Whether he sought an al Qa'ida
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         training camp or just any training camp? Is that what
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         you're --
                  THE COURT: And when he was working on the 39 Steps,
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         the "39 Ways."
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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: The "39 Ways" is a great example.
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         If he's working on --
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                  THE COURT: Does that have to -- are you making the
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         point that it's not shown sufficiently that that was for
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         al Qa'ida?
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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: Right. Kohlmann --
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                  THE COURT: It's not shown sufficiently that it was
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         jihadi support work?
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                  MS. SILVA PALMER: What I'm saying is that there's a
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distinction, and "39 Ways" is a great example. If he was just translating "39 Ways" because he's a guy interested in that sort of material, that's one -- that's an innocent activity. If, on the other hand, he's doing that because al Qa'ida has asked him to translate in order to further their efforts, that's a criminal activity.

And the "39 Ways" is a great point of how -- it's a great example of how Kohlmann's testimony infected the trial. Kohlmann said that that was a terrorist training manual, the defendant's witnesses said that was a standard religious text. So when he's -- when Kohlmann's saying these things about what he's doing, he's working directly for al Qa'ida, he's willing to do that when he comes home, that --

THE COURT: I don't think you're quite getting it.

MS. SILVA PALMER: I'm sorry.

THE COURT: So let me -- al Qa'ida as opposed to

Lashkar-e-Taiba, for example? In other words, are you being specific to work for a particular terrorist organization as opposed to -- and in particular, Kohlmann's evidence work in general for the support of jihad, whoever might be willing to listen?

MS. SILVA PALMER: I'm making the al Qa'ida distinction because that's the only thing that makes that conduct criminal. So what the government is saying -- what the government argued at trial was that he went to Yemen in order

to support al Qa'ida, and when he came back from Yemen, he continued his work by continuing to work for al Qa'ida. And that testimony -- Kohlmann was the only source of the argument that Mehanna worked for al Qa'ida when he returned.

So according to the government's logic, he went there to support al Qa'ida, he returned and continued to work for al Qa'ida. That piece was a critical factor in determining his intent when he went to Yemen in the first place. And that's what the government argued to the jury.

THE COURT: Okay. Thank you. Unless you have another point. I didn't mean to cut you off.

MS. SILVA PALMER: I guess, your Honor, I do have another point. And I urge you not to get distracted by this training camp issue, about whether they were in Yemen or not. It is a factor that Kohlmann testified on that is favorable to us. It doesn't matter whether Kohlmann was providing defense testimony or not. What Kohlmann said there was that there are camps in Yemen, and the defendant's witness said the opposite.

But that's not the critical factor, whether there were camps there. The critical factor is that Kohlmann said that Mehanna worked for al Qa'ida, and that can't help but impact the jury's choice between an innocent intent to travel to Yemen and a criminal intent.

THE COURT: Okay. So in the initial briefing there was an issue as to whether the defense should see the material

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that's at issue at the bottom of this, and I think the
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         government's position was it wasn't necessary for anybody to
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         look at it, but the government was willing to submit it in
         camera for the Court to look at.
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                  When we were here in May, I thought maybe there was a
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         targeted issue that could avoid a broader controversy. I think
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         we're in the broad controversy now, as the discussion of the
         record indicates, so I think to complete the information that
         is available and perhaps bears on this ultimate issue as to
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         whether there's a Brady violation, I think it's time for me to
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         look at that material. So we'll make arrangements through
         Mr. Chakravarty to have that submitted to the Court in camera.
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                  Am I correct that it's classified material? Is that
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         right?
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                  MR. CHAKRAVARTY: It is. And I think I've actually
         already made it available to the classified information
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         security officer.
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                  THE COURT: Okay. We have a mutual challenge.
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                  MR. WILLETT: Your Honor, Sabin Willett with
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         Miss Palmer. Can we get access to it as well?
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                  THE COURT: Not yet. Not yet. I don't say no
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         forever, but for now I'm going to look at it first.
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                  MR. WILLETT: Thank you.
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                  THE COURT: Obviously, this is all reserved, including
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         my review of that and whatever else may follow. Okay.
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you.
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              THE CLERK: All rise for the Court.
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               (The Court exits the courtroom at 2:30 p.m.)
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              THE CLERK: Court will be in recess.
              (The proceedings adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)
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CERTIFICATE I, Marcia G. Patrisso, RMR, CRR, Official Reporter of the United States District Court, do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript constitutes, to the best of my skill and ability, a true and accurate transcription of my stenotype notes taken in the matter of Criminal Action No. 09-10017-GAO-1, United States of America v. Tarek Mehanna. /s/ Marcia G. Patrisso MARCIA G. PATRISSO, RMR, CRR Official Court Reporter Date: 8/4/16